



Monastic Musings

Living in and Practicing the Presence of God

Fall - Winter 2018

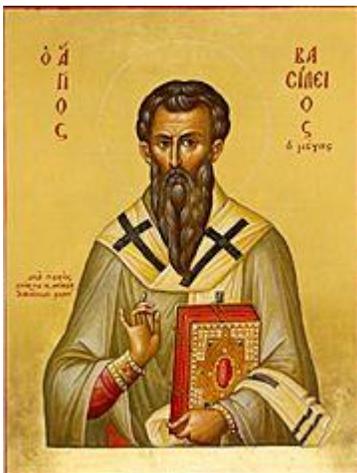
Another Year about to Close!

by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall

It is now Fall which means another year is about to close! As I look around me, I wonder what has become to civility with one another. I have never been a person who is blind to what is happening around me even if it is “underground”. I have also never been afraid just because there are things around me that do not seem to be in tune with my beliefs. But what I am finding today is that I am very uncomfortable with the fact that hatred has become the new moral compass within life. What happened to the “What Would Jesus Do” attitude? What happened to “love your neighbors as you want to be loved”? What happened to “this country is welcoming to all no matter where you are from”?

I have realized after “talking” with many other clergy I have known over the years that I am not alone in my feelings. It seems that those of us who have not gotten caught up in the “evangelical church movement” are the ones who seem to be able to sense the changes affecting the people around us in general. I attribute that to the fact that we have maintained our faith as was taught to us through the many years by the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church. We do not bend our faith and teachings to fit to today’s desires but instead continue to hold to the original faith and teach it to those who really want to live a life as taught by Jesus. I learned early as a child that history has a habit of repeating itself until you learn that lesson. What was old will become new again is another way of putting it. What goes around comes around is another thought. So if you push hate, hate will come to you. If you push love, then you will receive love. If you lend a hand, a hand will be there when you need one. In other words, do unto others as you would like done to you!

I think that St. Basil the Great, one of the Fathers of the Church, has said it well:



“The bread you do not use is the bread of the hungry.

The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the person who is naked.

The shoes you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot.

The money you keep locked away is the money of the poor.

The acts of charity you do not perform are the injustices you commit.”

So if we take off the rose colored glasses that it seems so many people are wearing today and see everything around us with clear vision, then what would the world really look like? First off, people would realize just how far removed from the teachings of Jesus we have come. But if we return to the true teachings of Jesus, I can honestly tell you that it would not be the world that we are seeing today! It would be a world where we would share freely that which God has freely given us so that others would become wanted and loved. No preconditions set, just freely giving! What a world that would be!

Shining Away the Darkness by Rev. Myrella LeClair

After the violent and hateful events of the last few weeks, it is time for us to recognize that evil is in our midst and that many of the current leaders of the U.S. have not only embraced but also encouraged violence against those who they view as their opposition: the mainstream media, people of color, immigrants, Jews, Muslims, the LGBT community, disabled people, poor people - actually, anyone who does not support their agenda or leadership. Yet, these very same leaders state that they are "Christians". Technically, that may be true if they have been baptized, but how can you call yourself a Christian when you do not follow the teachings of Jesus or act in the manner he acted? How is a true follower of Jesus supposed to act? Let us not ask "what would Jesus do" but "what DID Jesus do" when confronted with hatred and violence.



We know from the teachings of the Gospels that Jesus did not discriminate against anyone nor did he mock anyone or incite violence toward anyone. He actually defied the norms of the time by embracing those who were considered to be the outcasts of society, showing them that they too were equally loved by their Creator no matter how society or the ruling powers viewed them. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed his followers on how they should treat one another:

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you." Luke 6:27-28 (New King James Version)

Later on, Jesus gave his followers a new commandment:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35 (New King James Version)

I know how difficult it is to not respond with hatred towards those who hate you, who would physically hurt you, or who would deprive you of your basic human rights. We do need to challenge the haters through peaceful means as citizens of our country. More importantly, however, we need to challenge ourselves on a spiritual level to see our perceived "enemies" as

Jesus sees them. Before we can transform others' hearts, we must first transform our own hearts and not succumb to the darkness, becoming that which we despise. Jesus who is the Light of the world shines away the darkness (the evil) if we turn to him. Let us then turn to Jesus and see His Light shining upon all humanity, dispelling the darkness, seeing all of creation bathed in his ever-present and everlasting Light..

As we celebrate Jesus' birth this year, let us honor him by embracing and practicing what he has taught us: to see one another as He sees us. Let us extend his Peace and Light to all and to act as Jesus taught us, remembering that Light overcomes darkness. We honor Jesus by becoming like him.

Today and every day let Christ be reborn in you. Wishing you all a very Blessed Christmas!

My Menorah

By: Fr. Ron Lahti

As I've written before, I celebrate Chanukah. I chose this holiday because of its imagery, story and because we know Jesus himself celebrated the holiday (John 10:22). Besides, how can one go wrong with the foods associated with Chanukah: Latkes, Sufganiot (jelly donuts), Anything fried in oil!



In late-November, I was called to northern Minnesota to help my mother. She has been experiencing some illnesses since July and it was apparent she would not be able to return to living alone since she was unable to safely walk, or even stand for more than a few seconds. My Spouse Sam and I would have to go and clean out her apartment, deal with her financial affairs and get her comfortable and settled in a

nursing facility. A few days before we left for Minnesota it dawned on me that Chanukah falls right in the middle of the trip. I knew I couldn't schlep my full-sized menorah (the ritual candlestick used to hold the candles on the eight nights of Chanukah) and candles in my luggage. Sam found a small piece of 2x2 wood about 9 inches long. With a few quick holes drilled and a small extra piece glued and drilled for the shamash (the candle used to light the other candles each night), we improvised a crude, but workable menorah. We got a small package of birthday cake candles and off we went.

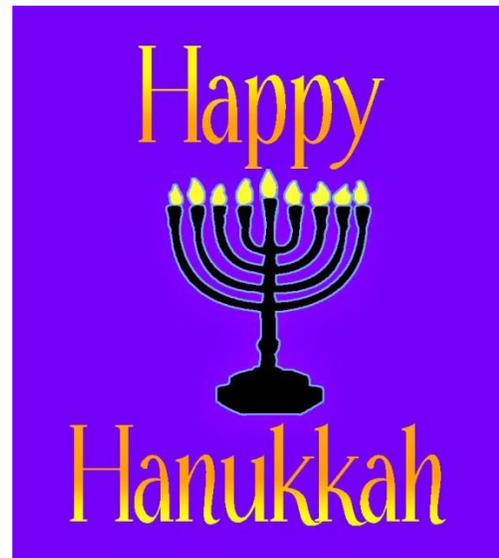
Cleaning out many years of "stuff" and memories was difficult. Add to this the fact that it was northern Minnesota in December – snow every day, the sun came out for about an hour once during the two weeks there, ice-covered roads – a very dreary place to be. I felt myself becoming sad. The first night of Chanukah I lit my little candles, said the blessings and looked at their little lights glowing in a very great darkness. I didn't feel any better – there wasn't a latke or sufganiot in sight. There were no synagogues with celebrations. Just cold winds, snow, ice and more work.

But then I read a story from Jewish tradition that when the Maccabees retook Jerusalem, and wanted to re-consecrate the Temple and they found the miraculous vial of oil (the events which are celebrated in Chanukah), they also found that the Temple's sacred vessels, including the menorah, were long gone – melted down for their gold. The Maccabees couldn't possibly come up with enough gold to create a new menorah in time. They decided they had to make a crude

menorah from wood until a proper one of gold could be created. So, a simple wood menorah was used to re-dedicate the holy Temple. Suddenly, my little makeshift menorah began to glow with a significance and holiness I couldn't imagine.

In the nights that followed as the number of candles grew, and their light increased, I learned valuable lessons. Even in the darkest times, G-d will find a way of hope, a way to make things work. I also feel that G-d honored my little efforts "to keep the feast", even with a crude makeshift menorah, and led me to the story of the Maccabees to show me that my efforts were appreciated and even blessed.

Moving my mother into the nursing facility was not easy for her or us. It was obviously sad as she had to leave her life of independence, surrounded by her "stuff", now whittled down to only a few precious possessions. On the 8th of December the nursing home had their family and residents Christmas party. It was a bittersweet time with mom and Sam as well as other family members who live nearby. I joked that in spite of all the Christmas songs, the Christmas food etc, it was still the seventh night of Chanukah and we celebrated together. Though I'm sure the singer they hired for entertainment didn't know "Chanukah, O Chanukah" or "I have a little dreidel" – my mother sternly forbade me to ask him! It was a precious time. And I know that in years to come, my full-size silver menorah will look pretty on the shelf as I light the little candles on my wooden menorah.



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